

Ohio EPA modifies fish consumption to note Lake Erie status

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After doing the required scientific legwork, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency is sounding the all-clear signal for concerns regarding toxic algae contamination in Lake Erie-caught walleye and yellow perch.

Even so, recommended consumption limitations remain for the two species, but for different chemical-associated health risks.

Also, for the 2012 fishing season, the state has relaxed fish consumption advisories in four water bodies and added more strict limits in 10 waterways.

This year's fish consumption advisory contains updates to 15 locations based on detections from samples that were taken from 14 lakes and reservoirs and 18 streams in 2010.

Microcystin samplings con-

ducted in Grand Lake Saint Marys and Lake Erie during the 2011 season were meant to determine if fish were affected by algal toxin.

Grand Lakes St. Marys made news last year when the water turned a sickly green, caused by a monster-sized blue-green algae bloom.

Lake Erie saw a similar outbreak, starting in the Western Basin and then shifting east as the summer progressed.

All samples taken in Lake Erie in November 2010, June 2011 and August 2011, testing yellow perch and walleye showed no detections, said Ohio EPA spokeswoman Linda Fee Oros.

Meanwhile, Grand Lake Saint Marys samples also were taken in November, June and August, and only the June sample set showed a detection level — but only in black crappie.

To round out the limited data available, Ohio EPA plans

to continue sampling, and will evaluate and post updates as they become available, Oros said.

A statewide advisory of one fish meal per week continues for all fish not otherwise mentioned because of mercury found in state fish tissue samples.

Mercury poses the greatest health risk for women of child-bearing age, pregnant and nursing mothers, and children under 15. Fish contaminated with high levels of mercury have been shown to cause neurological damage and impaired development of young children.

"We've had several areas where we could upgrade the status, which sometimes is difficult thing to do so it can be a big deal," Oros said.

"But it is also important to note that the advisories are good guidelines to help people determine when to eat fish and where to catch them. You may need to freeze some for eating

later or throw some back, but it's always nice to fish for them."

The fish consumption advisories for Lake Erie are:

■ One meal every two months for common carp 27 inches and over because of PCBs;

■ One meal per month for channel catfish, common carp less than 27 inches, freshwater drum, lake trout, smallmouth bass, steelhead trout, white bass, whitefish and white perch because of PCBs.

■ One meal per month for brown bullhead because of mercury.

■ Walleye and yellow perch remain under the statewide advisory of one meal per week.

Also, locally, LaDue Reservoir in Geauga County's Auburn Township has experienced a revision in its fish consumption advisory, since lower mercury levels will allow for the eating of two fish meals per week for brown

bullhead and largemouth bass.

Ohio EPA partners with the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in developing consumption advisories for Ohio-caught fish.

These advisories are updated annually based on processed samples collected during the previous fishing season.

Fish consumption advisory contact information will be provided to anglers in the Ohio Fishing Regulations booklet with fishing license purchase beginning March 1.

All Ohio fish advisories can be found on Ohio EPA's website at <http://1.usa.gov/xAhWWJ> or by calling 614-644-2160 to request a copy.

More detailed information about fish consumption can be found at Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Centers, local health departments, Ohio Department of Natural Resources district offices and Ohio EPA offices.